

Pearle Cotton Mill and Dam
Elberton vicinity
Elbert County
Georgia

HAER No. GA-42

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

PEARLE COTTON MILL AND DAM
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Location: The site is 1.7 miles north of Georgia State Highway 72, on Elbert County Road 245. The archeological remains of the factory are located along Beaverdam Creek, about six miles east of Elberton, Georgia

UTM: (Factory) 17.340600.3773870
QUAD: Heardmont

Date of Construction: Factory, 1895
Dam, 1890-1895

Present Owner: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Present Use: None

Significance: The Pearle Cotton Mill is an industrial archeological site that once served as the focus of a mill village known as Beverly, Georgia. The factory was built in 1895 by Thomas M. Swift of Elberton, Georgia. Though the mill has operated under many owners and was ultimately abandoned, it represents a locally significant industrial enterprise that played an important role in the local community.

Historian: John P. Johnson

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PEARLE COTTON MILL
BEVERLY, GEORGIA

CHAPTER I. MILLS ALONG BEAVERDAM CREEK

The Pearle Cotton Mill is an industrial archeological site along Beaverdam Creek approximately 6 miles east of Elberton, Georgia. The granite foundation walls of the cotton factory date from 1895 and the stone piers of the dam, located one-half mile upstream, date from 1890-1895. Only foundations remain of the 38 company houses and five warehouses associated with the cotton factory that served as the focus of a mill village known as Beverly, Georgia.

The first permanent settlement in Elbert County occurred in the last two decades of the 18th century. Sawmills and grist mills were built along the Broad River and Beaverdam, Van, Coldwater, and Pickens Creeks. Nineteenth century census records of manufacturers for Elbert County are very incomplete and give only a partial view of small industry. However, by 1810, the county could boast of a wagon works, two gun powder mills, and three bark mills. Although no textile factories were operating in the county in 1810, approximately 200,000 yards of cotton cloth were woven in homes on 835 hand looms. Local blacksmith shops, distilleries, and grist mills supplied settlers with the necessities of life.¹

Up the Beaverdam Creek from the ruins of the Pearle Mill are the remains of at least two and possibly three small mill sites. Stephen and Betsy Heard, original settlers of this region, granted 899 acres along Beaverdam Creek to Joseph Gray in 1807, and the first record of a mill is in 1811. The mill remained in the Gray family until at least 1843, but its exact location is unknown.²

William Allen's Grist Mill comprised a vital part of his plantation on which corn, wheat, cotton, and tobacco were raised. Corn meal, the southern staple, was custom ground for both his slaves and local farmers. Upon William Allen's death in 1826, his plantation and mills passed to his wife Sarah, and in 1830 to his son, Beverly Allen. The mill was known as the Beverly Allen Grist Mill until Beverly's death in 1846. It then became known as "Milly Gray's Mill" when it was owned by Beverly's widow, Mildred W. Allen. In 1848, Mildred W. Allen remarried to John F. Gray. John F. Gray disappears from the records of this era and it is likely that he moved from the area. In 1871, Milly Gray deeded the plantation and grist mills to her nephew, Beverly A. Henry.³

Milly Gray's Mill was in operation until 1880 and is mentioned in Reports on the Water-Power of the United States for the tenth census. At this time, nine mills operated along the 30-mile course of Beaverdam Creek, which drained 185 square miles in the center of Elbert County. The mills had falls recorded at from 12' to 20':

"At Gray's Mill, the second as the stream is ascended (from the Savannah River) although only about 10-foot fall is used, the total of the shoal is stated to be nearly 25 feet in a distance of a mile."⁴

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Unfortunately, Gray's Mill is not listed in the incomplete 1880 Census of Manufacturers for Elbert County. At this time, however, the Eureka Grist Mill was operating one mile upstream. The Eureka Mill operated on a 12' head to custom grind wheat and corn on three runs of stones. It operated year round in 1880 and employed two men to grind 120 barrels of wheat flour and 65,000 pounds of corn meal.

In July 1889, Mildred W. Gray's estate was administered by Thomas M. Swift, Vice-President of the newly-created Elberton Loan and Savings Bank (1887). Swift sold the five-acre mill tract to J. W. McCalla, J. H. McCalla, and W. H. Mattox. For their \$1,300 these men secured the Allen-Gray Mill and water rights on Beaverdam Creek. At this time, Mattox announced plans to build a cotton mill at "Milly Gray's Mill." A new company with William H. Mattox as President included John W. McCalla as Secretary and Treasurer and the following directors: Nathaniel G. Long, Andrew J. Cleveland, John H. Grogan, Eugene B. Heard and Jeptha B. Jones, Sr., all of Elbert County.

This new enterprise constituted the second cotton mill to be built in Elbert County. The first was begun at Anthony Shoals on the Broad River in 1847. After 1859, it was known as Thompson's Factory until destroyed by fire sometime in the late 1870s.

W. H. Mattox planned to begin work immediately on enlarging the grist mill into a cotton factory and to have it in operation for the next cotton crop. The survey of the Georgia, Carolina and Northern Railroad located a proposed rail line less than one mile north of the mill. Upon his return from a trip in July 1889 to various textile machinery building companies in the north, W. H. Mattox announced that cotton processing machinery would soon arrive at the mill. A Mr. Bradley (first name unknown) from South Carolina was named Superintendent and put in charge of arranging the new machinery. On July 23, 1889, work was under way on the dam and repairs were scheduled to be completed in about a week. The wooden grist mill was still used as a corn mill and the structure was expanded to accommodate eight carding machines and spinning frames for 1000 spindles. The overshot water wheel was possibly removed at this time to accommodate at least one turbine.

At first, the factory was to employ 12 to 15 hands. However, if it proved profitable, there were plans to build one of the largest mills in the south. A town with neat cottages was included as part of the plan. In October 1889, the Heardmont Cotton Mills was incorporated in Elbert County. By this time, Mattox had added several investors as directors: Luther H. O. Martin, Joseph N. Worley, Bedford H. Heard, and Beverly A. Henry as Trustee, all of Elbert County. Joining the group were Thomas W. Holt of Wilkes County, Georgia, and Isaac H. McCalla of Abbeville, South Carolina. The \$10,000 capital accumulated to this point amounted to 100 equal shares in the company. The money was used to finance the enlargement of the grist mill, the purchase of machinery, the erection of a store house for merchandise, and the operation of a merchant mill or company store. It is also possible that two or three houses for the workers were built by the company at this time.

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About mid-March 1890, the Heardmont Cotton Mill began spinning cotton yarn from lint cotton. Lint cotton was a by-product of the Elberton Oil Mill, an enterprise begun in 1888 by T. M. Swift and others. On June 16, 1890, a heavy thunderstorm swept through Elbert County and the Heardmont Cotton Mills were struck by lightning. In a very short while these mills, which "were the pride and boast of our county, being our largest manufacturing enterprise and, as we fondly hoped nucleus around which, encouraged by their posterity, would spring up many smaller industries that would give new vigor and stronger impetus to the era of prosperity that is just dawning on our grand old county, were no more."¹⁰

Lightning had apparently struck the picking room and ignited the cotton fibers, resulting in a sudden and rampaging fire that could not be brought under control. The fire was a total loss: buildings, machinery, material, and finished products were all consumed in the blaze. There was no fire insurance, as insurance companies at this time refused to insure cotton mills that operated cotton picking machinery within the main mill building.

From the burning of the Heardmont Cotton Mill in 1890 until the construction of the Pearle Cotton Mill in 1895, the area along Beaverdam Creek remained idle.

After the fire, the Heardmont Cotton Mill was indebted to the Elberton Loan and Savings Bank. In 1895 the bank sold the abandoned mill tract, which was increased to 25 acres, to J. H. Grogan, J. W. McCalla, W. H. Mattox, J. B. Jones, and E. B. Heard for the unpaid mortgage of \$2,500. At this time, J. H. Grogan sold his interest to J. W. McCalla for \$135. In August 1895, J. W. McCalla sold his interest, including Grogan's and Jones' interest, to Thomas M. Swift and John K. Swift of Elberton.¹¹

Thomas M. Swift (1847-1932) was born in Elberton, son of William F. Smith and Nancy Jane Kellar. When young Swift was 6 years old his father died, and by the time he was 23, he was operating his father's old general store. Swift erected a brick building in 1885 and the brick "Swift Block" in downtown Elberton in 1888 (the Swift block is still standing). In 1888 Swift organized Elberton's first oil mill and in 1892, the first steam-powered cotton factory.¹²

The Swift Cotton Mill building is located near downtown Elberton with a siding on the old Georgia, Carolina and Northern Railroad tracks. In April 1893, the Swift Cotton Mill began operating 600 spindles and within a year was weaving on 116 power looms. The one-story brick building was 80' x 375' with a lantern roof. The mill was powered by a steam engine and produced its own electricity. Automatic sprinklers throughout the factory were supplied by two large water tanks. In 1893, the company built 40 company houses and announced its intention to build 20 more for the 200 factory workers. Several of the houses are still standing along Gordon Street and constitute the first mill district in Elberton.¹³

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The first cloth was woven at the Swift Cotton Mill on May 22, 1893, and Miss Mamie Swift, first daughter of Thomas M. Swift, sewed the first eight yards into a dress. Thomas M. Swift had large investments in a cotton plantation, an oil mill complete with ginnery and press, and the Swift Cotton Mill. The Swift and Ethridge Granite Quarries were also pioneering Elberton's largest industry.¹⁴

CHAPTER II: PEARLE COTTON MILL

The Elberton Star editorials of 1895 clamored for another cotton mill to supplement the Swift Cotton Mill. T. M. Swift announced in August that he would build the Pearle Cotton Mill and that it would be in operation by January 1896. The Pearle Cotton Mill was built one-half mile downstream from the ruins of the Heardmont Cotton Mill and, through Swift's influence in the legislature, all obstructions were cleared from Beaverdam Creek in the summer of 1895 by Georgia State law. Only mill dams were excluded from the law.¹

Sixty laborers, probably from the local prison farm, were engaged to rebuild the Heardmont Cotton Mill dam. The present dam dates from 1890-1895. A half-mile long mill race was excavated from the dam to the new factory site. The Pearle Cotton Mill had a two and a half-story main mill building; one and a half stories were granite and one story was brick. The entire structure was about 400' long and 80' wide. A single story granite section to the west housed the Boiler Room, Engine Room and Picker Room.²

Operations began at the Pearle Cotton Mill in January 1896. R. A. Field superintended the operation of three picking machines, 16 carding machines, and 3,000 spindles for manufacturing lint cotton into yarn and twine. The mill was managed by William A. Swift, T. M. Swift's son. In April 1896, James Monroe Smith, a wealthy planter from Oglethorpe County, loaned \$20,000 to the Swift Brothers and held title to the property and machinery for the Pearle Cotton Mill.³ The Pearle Mill village became known as Beverly, Georgia, when a U.S. Post Office was opened for the factory and its workers in 1897. In 1898, the Beverly Methodist Episcopal Church was deeded to W. A. Swift as Trustee, and the church was built near the southwest corner of the bridge over Beaverdam Creek in close proximity to the mill.

The Pearle Cotton Mill was constructed at the zenith of the textile industry boom in 19th century Georgia. In the first three months of 1896, 27 new cotton factories were organized or established in the State. This represented nearly one-third of the total of 92 mills begun in the entire south during the same period.⁵

In December 1899, Thomas M. Swift, William A. Swift and James Y. Swift incorporated the "Pearle Cotton Mills," named in honor of T. M. Swift's second daughter, Pearle. The company was established for the purpose of spinning cotton yarns and manufacturing rope, sheeting, cheese cloth, and batting. The \$30,000 capital stock divided into equal shares of \$100, with a chartered provision of increasing the capital to \$100,000. The Elbert County Superior Court granted the charter in January 1900. In March,⁶ James M. Smith loaned an additional \$15,000 to the enterprise.

Thomas M. Swift served as the Elbert County representative in the State Legislature from 1896 until 1899 and was in the State Senate from 1900-1901. As a successful spokesman for the emerging textile industry in Georgia, Swift believed that the south needed to diversify in textile manufacturing. He often expressed the opinion that he would like to see a "cotton mill in every militia district in the south...to use up every bale of cotton we raise." To illustrate this point, Swift used the following example:

I have been making yarns for weavers in Philadelphia...and have had all that I could do. That suit of clothes you wear is made of southern cotton transformed into clay worsted by the skill of a New England mill. Go into any store in the land and hidden under various deceptive names you will buy back some of the very cotton which you looked upon in the field last year.

In 1901 Swift advised cotton mill men to "specialize." The Swift Cotton Mill operated 7,040 spindles and 174 looms, and the Pearle Cotton Mill operated 7,500 spindles and no power looms. The factories manufactured large quantities of cotton thread on bobbins for Northern weaving mills, bales of netting for the codfish industry in Newfoundland and several varieties of cable and shipcord. The two mills processed 6,000 bales of upland and lint cotton per year.⁸

In 1899 farms in Elbert County produced 6,344,110 pounds of good commercial upland cotton that was ginned into 14,580 square bales and 365 round bales. The 1899 harvest was the first time farmers had the choice of putting up their cotton in square or round bales. S. S. Brewer, at the Elberton Cotton Gin, operated a new Lowry round bale gin and press. This was only one year after the first round bale cotton gin was introduced in Georgia by George Harrison at Desoto, in Sumter County.

Thomas M. Swift's concern for the future of Georgia was echoed by B. S. Walker of the Bank of Monroe. Speaking at the annual convention of Georgia bankers at Warm Springs in 1899, Walker remarked that "every bale of cotton produced in Georgia should be spun in Georgia" and we challenged bankers to do their "duty" to encourage local cotton mills:

A cotton mill with 100 hands will spin 1,000 bales of cotton annually, worth at present prices \$25,000 in its raw state and \$50,000 when spun. This force will consist of 15 men, 25 women and 60 children. In the fields this force will not produce more than 300 bales of cotton worth \$7,500, while in the mill the value of their labor will amount to \$25,000.¹⁰
This is why New England is rich and the south is poor.

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In 1900 Elbert County's population was 19,729, an increase of 4,353 over the 1890 figure. The county's manufacturing establishments included the two cotton factories owned by T. M. Swift, the Elberton Oil Mill, three flour and grist mills, several sawmills, and three guano factories. A new steam-powered flour mill in Elberton advertised a capacity of 100 barrels of roller-ground flour per day. This was also a prosperous time for the two carriage factories and new, brick commercial blocks were being erected around the town common. Elberton had a hydroelectric plant on Beaverdam Creek, two banks, and a city water works under construction. The town had been serviced by the rail seats on the Seaboard Air Line Railroad since 1890 and the Southern Railroad since 1878. Elberton's new influx of capital was being generated by receipts from four granite quarries.¹¹

In 1902, six years after operations began at the Pearle Cotton Mill, T. M. Swift was still President. William A. Swift, his son, lived in the largest house in the village and served as Manager, Secretary, and Treasurer of the enterprise. The engineer and machinist at the mill was M. N. Phelps. The factory Superintendent was L. A. Almond, a technical school graduate and machinist who had worked at the Swift Cotton Mill in Elberton. Almond was assisted by the Head Carder, W. H. Epps, and the Head Spinner, J. W. Reynolds. Frank Nix was the overseer₁₂ on the night shift and J. C. Thomas was the company storekeeper.

In 1902 the factory had 8,000 ring spindles and 2,000 twister spinners. From an excellent newspaper account of the factory at this time it is possible to trace the flow of cotton from bale to finished yarn:

Baled lint cotton from the local ginneries entered the factory at the Picker Room. The cotton grades were mixed before being run through the picking machinery, which cleaned out the trash and delivered cotton in rolls of batting. The rolls were carried into the Carding Room on the first floor of the main mill. In the Carding Room the rolls were reduced by combing out the fibers into roving. The roving was carried to the Spinning Room on the second floor. From the spinning frames the cotton was spooled and some was twisted into yarn. Some yarn was sent to the warpers. The principal products of the mill were yarns, warps and skeins, rope and twisted yarns on tapes and cones. Orders were carried up the hill on wagons to a storage house₁₃ on a rail siding for the Georgia, Carolina and Northern Railroad.

CHAPTER III: BEVERLY, GEORGIA

William A. Swift, manager of the factory, served as President of the local literary and social club. In 1901 he published his views on the social conditions of the people at Beverly:

Most of these people...too poor to own lands, were in a sad condition indeed. Unlettered, with no employment, suffering from adversity which seems to delight in visiting the poor, anything which would give them work was a godsend. We have here quite a colony recruited from this class, and they are today as self-respecting as any community of people in the land. They make all the way from \$3 to \$6 a week apiece, with plenty of work for every member of the family.

Commenting on the employment practices at the factory:

It is not to the economical interests of mill owners to have children under twelve or probably fourteen years of age, because they are wasteful and often in the way. The pressure to employ them comes from the families themselves, and has been essential in the crush and necessity of new conditions.

It was W. A. Swift's opinion that as the textile mills became established in Georgia there would be fewer children employed¹

By 1900, the Beverly Church was known as the Pearle Mill Mission. A. D. Echols received an appointment to the mission in October 1900, and published his views concerning child labor at the factory in the Elberton Star. In July 1901, Pearle Mill hosted its first large barbecue, followed by another in 1902 with 1500 in attendance from both of Swift's cotton mills and from all over northeast Georgia.²

J. W. Baker's 1905 map illustrates the mill village at Beverly. Only 18 houses are shown on this map. However, it is known that by 1908 there were 38 company houses. The map is helpful in locating farms, but the illustration of the company homes at Beverly is inaccurate. The company houses, store, and church were all located within a quarter-mile radius of the factory.⁴

The 1900 census provides a personal look at the families at Beverly. Twenty households with 40 persons working in the factory are listed. The census taker, upon leaving Dr. B. A. Henry's house (at Beverly Plantation), proceeded down the hill south to the village, where he counted the families which included those listed below.

The first household listed was the home of J. H. Lovern, age 36, boss carder in the factory. He resided with his wife Ella, age 40, and six children. Ella did not work; she was at home taking care of the two youngest children with her mother, Elizabeth Tippins, age 66. One daughter, age 16, and two sons, ages 11 and 8, worked in the factory. The oldest son, Emory, was enrolled at school.

At the next household, S. A. Johnson, age 52, was a farmer. His two sons, ages 28 and 16, worked in the factory. His wife, Jane, age 61, worked at home with one daughter, age 21. T. J. Wallace, age 42, was the engineer. He lived with his wife, Mandy, age 41, with seven children of which four worked in the factory. Two children were enrolled in school and one young child was at home. J. C. Thomas, age 49, from South Carolina, was the bookkeeper for the company. He lived with his wife and three children, none of whom worked in the factory. Will Smith, age 41, lived with his wife Donna, age 35, and they had seven children. The three oldest children worked in the factory. Smith, a bricklayer by trade, may have worked at the brick factory in Middleton.

Ten other heads of households worked in the factory, as did members of their families. William A. Swift, age 29 and a bachelor, was the Treasurer of the Pearle Cotton Mill and lived at the Superintendent's house.

In July 1905, four carloads of new spinning machinery arrived at the factory. With the installation of the new machinery, 30,000 pounds of cotton yarn production was projected. Between 1900 and 1905 the mill had almost doubled in spinning capacity. The number of carding machines had increased to 28 and the number of spindles to 8,500. A proposed rail line from the warehouse was never built. In April 1907, four additional carloads of machinery arrived at the factory.

In 1907 Thomas M. Swift was instrumental in incorporating the mill village at Beverly into a town. The corporate limits of Beverly included land within a quarter-mile radius from the east end of the bridge across Beaverdam Creek at the Pearle Cotton Mill. The new minister, C. E. Riley, was appointed Mayor. W. H. Epps, head carder at the factory, John T. Vail, and William A. Swift were the town's first councilmen. The incorporation included the rights and responsibilities of owning a mill village on a valuable water power site.

By 1908 there were 38 company houses in Beverly, 22 four-room houses, three six-room houses, two five-room houses, four three-room houses, six two-room houses, and one seven-room house for the Superintendent. In addition to the houses, the company property included two mules, a wagon, a barn, and a corn crib. Three wooden cotton warehouses, each 52' x 72', one warehouse 30' x 80', one warehouse 70' x 80', and one oil house 10' x 18' were located near the factory.

The cotton factory was powered by a twin pair of water wheels from James Leffel and Company, one of the largest turbine manufacturers in the United States. The twin turbines generated 150 H.P. This was supplemented by a Greene steam engine rated at 200 H.P. The equipment in the Boiler Room and Engine Room included two R. D. Cole boilers (100 H.P. and 150 H.P.), a condenser pump and system, two steam pumps for the boilers, one injector pump for a boiler, and one power pump for a boiler. There was one 100,000-gallon water tank and tower for supplying the boiler.

Exhaust from the boilers was directed into the granite chimney on the west wall of the Boiler Room. A large smoke stack extended out of the chimney. The factory had a fire pump and a 12,000 gallon tank that supplied the sprinkler system.

Machinery in the Machine Shop, also the Engine Room, included a steam press, a Shewmaker and Boyd machine lathe, a power hacksaw, and a power gear cutter. The shop also had a wood rip saw, two power emery wheels, lace leathers, and small job tools.

The Picker Room housed the bale breaker, two intermediate pickers, and two finishers. The Carding Room Machinery included 16 Petty cards with 24" doffers and 12 Roller cards with 28" doffers, with sets of grinders for each. The textile machinery in the main mill included eight drawing frames, four slubbers, and six fly-frames. Twenty-two Whittin spinning frames with 204 spindles each and 14 Lowell spinning frames with 204 spindles each spun cotton yarn. Two Haskell-Dawes rope machines and four formers twisted cotton rope. There were also four spoolers, three cone winders, two warpers, eleven reels for skein yarns, one slasher, and two Lowell beam warpers.

In August 1908, Northeast Georgia experienced its worst flood of the century. Beaverdam Creek, the Broad River, and the Savannah River all rose 15'-20' above the highwater mark established by the August 1852 flood. Elberton lost several thousand dollars in damages to the hydroelectric plant on Beaverdam Creek and \$50,000 in damage to bridges and public roads. Farmers sustained extensive damage to crops, especially on the bottom lands, and the hill lands were badly washed. In spite of all the destruction, no lives were reported lost as a result of the flooding.¹⁰

The managers of Pearle Cotton Mill conservatively estimated a loss of \$17,000. Flood waters reportedly reached the second floor of the factory. Some of the machinery on both the first and second floors was badly rusted because it was under water for two days. The company could not recover its losses from the flood because it had no insurance, and when creditors demanded payment on overdue accounts, the Pearle Cotton Mill was forced to declare bankruptcy.¹¹

In October 1908, the Pearle Cotton Mill declared bankruptcy after only 12 years in business. The U.S. District Court of the Northern District of Georgia, Eastern Division, ordered the property to be sold and appointed E. B. Heard to be Trustee for the bankrupt company. Efforts were made to clean the factory up and day and night watchmen were maintained on the payroll. By November 17, \$986.97 had been collected from selling rope already manufactured. Neglected grocery, oil, telephone, telegraph and coal freight bills were paid. Restoration work soon began and the leather belts were reoiled and the boilers repainted. The factory was also equipped with electric lights, probably lit by a generator in the turbine room.¹²

Trustee Heard rejected bids of \$52,000 and \$60,000 for the bankrupt company. Hoping to prompt a sale, a two-span wood arch bridge was built across the creek to replace the bridge washed away in the August flood. In May 1909, Paul Bowden purchased the forty-acre property at public auction for \$61,250. The deed from Heard to Bowden included water rights to Beaverdam Creek, the Pearle Cotton Mill with its machinery and equipment, the store house, and 38 company houses. This transfer of property did not include five Whittin twisters in the mill and one iron safe in the store room.

Paul Bowden, acting as President and Treasurer, renamed the enterprise the Beverly Cotton Mills. Bowden, a banker at Thompson in Clarke County, was a financial advisor to the wealthy James Monroe Smith of Oglethorpe County. Bowden in turn deeded the company to Smith. Smith held first liens since he had loaned money to the Swift Brothers. According to Smith's biographer, this was one of Smith's worst investments, since the mill never operated during his lifetime after he had secured ownership. The Beverly Cotton Mill¹³ was operated marginally from 1908-1912 and was idle from 1912-1916.

In October 1908, Thomas M. Swift resigned from active management of the Swift Cotton Mills and turned his attention to the newly expanding granite industry. In June 1909, the old Swift Cotton Mills in Elberton were reorganized as the Home Cotton Mills with W. O. Jones as President, Isaac G. Swift as Vice-President, and P. M. Hawes as Secretary-Treasurer. By 1914 the Home Cotton Mills had been sold to J. C. Plonk and Associates and rechartered as the Elberton Cotton Company.¹⁴

CHAPTER IV: BEVERLY COTTON MILL

The bankruptcy of the Pearle Cotton Mill was devastating to the town of Beverly. The 1900 census had reported 40 people living at Beverly, but there were only 14 people counted in the statistical census of 1910. In search of factory work, many families moved to Elberton or to the new cotton factory opening in Calhoun Falls, South Carolina. The railroad discussed the possibility of removing the Pearle Station because the factory was idle. Local farmers and merchants persuaded the railroad not to take the station down.¹

The Beverly Cotton Mill remained idle from 1912 until August 1916, when Matthew B. Pitts leased the factory for \$100 a month from Paul Bowden, administrator for James M. Smith, and operated the company as the Beverly Cotton Mill. Pitts secured government contracts to weave cotton duck cloth and reopened the factory with a complete facility for dyeing raw cotton fibers. The factory ran 7,500 spindles and installed 62 new duck cloth looms. The principal product of the factory was fibre-dyed cotton duck cloth for leggings. C. L. Faulkner was hired by Pitts to superintend the installation of new cotton preparatory machinery. Faulkner had previously been Superintendent of the Elberton Cotton Mill.²

In November 1917, M. B. Pitts purchased the factory with a 40-acre tract at auction for \$41,000. In February 1918, the Beverly Cotton Mill was incorporated with the following directors: C.E. Pitts, J.H. Grogan, A.B. Edwards, and George C. Grogan. There was some remodeling done at the factory at this time. In March 1918, the factory was supplied with electricity from the Gregg Shoals Power Plant on the Savannah River. The electric power was used to supplement the water power and replace steam-generated power. Sometime before 1921 Pitts installed³ a new turbine and generated his own electricity for the factory.

In June 1918, M. B. Pitts traveled to New York to arrange for the purchase of additional machinery. Pitts was financed by T. J.⁴ Hallyburton, Samuel H. McGee, and several bankers from New York. The agreements between Pitts and the receiver for the late James Monroe Smith were satisfied in a deed dated January 2, 1919.⁵ In March 1920, S. H. McGee dissolved the Beverly Cotton Mills and sold the company to Pitts for \$150,000. An inventory⁶ taken at the time of this sale failed to list any power looms. In June 1922, Pitts announced the arrival of new machinery. From 1920 until 1925 the enterprise was known as the Pitts Manufacturing Company. Sometime in 1923, Pitts went into receivership,⁷ but the factory continued to operate until April 1925.

In May 1925, the factory was renamed the Beaver Cotton Mills. Frank Van Ness and Associates purchased the company from John T. Dennis, receiver of the bankrupt Pitts Manufacturing Company. Van Ness Associates were industrial engineers from New York and were actively engaged in acquiring southern cotton mills. Van Ness Associates reached a financial agreement with Mathew B. Pitts for the sale of the factory for \$80,000. By the agreement, Pitts had to borrow \$10,000 at 6 percent interest and install a fire protection system including pumps, pipes, and sprinklers. Repairs for the company houses were fixed at \$4,000. Payroll and general expenses were fixed at \$6,000. By this agreement, Pitts would continue to manage the business, buy cotton, pay local taxes, and keep⁸ the property covered with ample fire insurance with Standard New York.

By 1927, Frank Shinn had replaced Mathew B. Pitts as local manager for Van Ness Associates. In 1927 the factory operated the three Kitson pickers, six carding machines, 3,000 ring spindles, and 1,000 twisting spindles. The factory purchased 1,500 bales of 3/4", 7/8", and 1"⁹ tinges and low grade cotton each year, to spin into yarn and rope.

The 1928 Soil Survey Map of Elbert County erroneously refers to the factory as the Beaverdam Mill, while it was usually known as the Beaver Cotton Mill. In the fall of 1928 a suspicious fire destroyed the two and one-half story main mill building. The mill had been idle for some time, and was probably not doing well financially. In any case, no public record of the exact nature of the fire survives. The one-story granite section (containing the Boiler Room, Engine Room, and Picker Room), the turbine pit, and the generating room were not destroyed. The fire was considered a total loss for the Van Ness Company, and textile manufacturing was never resumed at the mill. The factory was idle from 1928 until c. 1935.¹⁰

After the 1928 fire the factory and property were held by the First National Bank of Elbert County. At this time, Raymond E. Chandler, Sr., an employee of the cotton factory since 1903, was hired as caretaker of the property. Chandler moved with his family into the Superintendent's house. Within a short period of time the bank sold the turbine and electrical generator, possibly to the City of Elberton. The 12,000 gallon water tank and tower, located on the hill north of the factory, was sold to the Georgia Granite Company in Elberton. ¹¹The 10,000 gallon water tank and tower was sold to W. D. Tutt.

About 1935 a Mr. Mercer (first name unknown) leased from the bank the right to operate a corn mill at the factory. Mercer installed a small turbine in the turbine pit and set¹² up a small corn mill in the southwest corner of the generating room.

In November 1936, the First National Bank of Elbert County sold the 40-acre company tract and 10 acres south of Beaverdam Creek to Webb Tatum for \$250. Tatum came from Woodbury, Georgia, in 1926 to become Elbert County's Farm Agent. Tatum sold 21 acres south of the creek to R. E. Chandler, Sr., for \$250. About 1939 Tatum and his family moved into the Superintendent's house and the Chandler family moved into a former company house south of the creek. Tatum sold the steam engine, boilers, and cotton machinery (destroyed in the 1928 fire) for scrap metal. About 35 company houses were sold at public auction. All the houses were sold for lumber at approximately \$19 each and were subsequently removed from the property. About 1936 Tatum replaced the turbine installed by Mercer with the present 56" turbine, manufacturer unknown. Tatum operated a large corn mill in the southeast corner of the generating room and a hammermill in the Picker Room. Tatum's corn mill was manufactured by the Anderson Machine and Foundry Company of Anderson, South Carolina, and was in use until c. 1948. The dam was replanked and the wood faced with sheet metal by Webb Tatum sometime during his ownership. About 1949 the ruins of the Heardmont Cotton Mill, located one-half mile up Beaverdam Creek from the Pearle Cotton Mill, were removed. In 1953 Webb Tatum sold 29 acres of the company tract to R. E. Chandler, Sr. The Chandler family had moved back into the Superintendent's house in 1943 after a tornado destroyed their house south of the creek.¹³

In 1959 Elbert County built the present concrete bridge over the creek just west of the factory. A concrete block building was built northwest of the bridge and was used by the Chandlers as an automobile repair garage. In 1962 R. E. Chandler, Sr., sold one acre, including the garage, to his son, R. E. Chandler, Jr. In 1974 R. E. Chandler's widow sold 91 acres south of the creek and 29 acres north of the creek to R. E. Chandler, Jr. In October 1978, R. E. Chandler, Jr., sold a total of 191.42 acres north and south of the creek to the United States of America. The property was being acquired by the Savannah District of the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers for the Richard B. Russell Dam and Lake Project.¹⁴

The ruins at the Pearle Cotton Mill and Dam were photographed and measured drawings were prepared during the summer of 1980 by the Historic American Buildings Survey. The factory and property will be inundated by the reservoir for the Russell Dam sometime in 1981-82.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I - Mills along Beaverdam Creek

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APPENDIX: ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Main Mill is a one-and-a-half-story granite building with a brick second story. There is a stair and bell tower for the main mill on the north facade. There is a water closet for the main mill on the south facade, with access on both the first and second floors. There are two clean-out openings near ground level on the south side. The basement is L-shaped on the southwest corner of the main mill. The first floor is 206' x 65', and the windows are 9' high and 4' wide, with granite sills and wooden lintels. On the second floor no windows remain, but they were presumably the same size as the first-floor windows.

The Boiler Room, Engine Room, and Picker Room are of different rock construction than the main mill, are single-story, and were covered by a pitched roof.

The Boiler Room, which is entered from the north facade, is 23' x 40'. It still has the granite chimney outside for the smokestack, now removed. The brick bases for the boilers were uncovered in this room. The stone Cistern, located west of this room, supplied water to the boilers and originally had a wooden extension on the top, size unknown. It is 17.5' in diameter and about 10' deep.

The Engine Room, which is entered from the north facade, measures 24' x 65'. The granite bases for the steam engine and pulley are in their original location. The brick piers for the first floor are still standing.

The Picker Room is entered from the north facade. An entrance into the Engine Room is now bricked in. This room measures 35' x 65'. Six stone piers supported beams for the floor. There is an opening into the Turbine Room.

The two-story Turbine Room is constructed of brick and has industrial sash windows (7'-9" x 6'-5.5"). There are four metal air ventilators in the roof of the turbine room. A prominent feature is the bell-shaped concrete form directly over the turbine power shaft and separate control shaft. The fly wheel or pulley on the turbine power shaft is 34" in diameter and 10.5" wide.

The Turbine pit contains a 58" diameter vertical turbine. The manufacturer is still unknown. There is an arched granite tail race on the south wall and it is probably original. There is a head race on the west wall, leading from the raceway. There is evidence that an opening existed into the main mill, probably for a belt leading under the first floor. The turbine pit is full of mud up to the top of the turbine, probably 4' to 5' deep. The coupling type on the shaft to the turbine has not been identified (see photograph or drawing). The south facade of the turbine pit has been repaired with concrete, probably when a turbine of another size was installed.

The Pump Room, a single room with a 9' high ceiling, is constructed of concrete. It is located outside of the mill, east of the Turbine Room. There are steel intake and discharge tubes and a poured concrete pump base inside.

The Raceway was the first part of this factory to be built in 1895. The stones used in its construction are massive. From the dam, located about 0.5 mile up the creek, the race is earthen. There is a sluice gate on the south side of the raceway before the trash rack. The trash rack is steel, of an unusual type. The raceway is 16' wide at this point. It is about 10.5' deep; however, there are 4 to 5 feet of sediment in the race. The race narrows to 12' at the head-race opening. There was a wooden lintel over the head-race opening and the steel pipe (leading into the turbine pit) is exposed. On both sides above the race walls are concrete piers that supported a roof which used to prevent anything from falling into the race and entering the turbine. The tail race from the turbine pit is earthen and measures about 18' wide. It leads south to the creek.

Addendum to
Pearle Cotton Mill and Dam
Elbert County Road 245, Beaverdam Creek
Pearl vicinity
Elbert County
Georgia

HAER No. GA-42

HAER,
GA,
53-3138.
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PHOTOGRAPHS